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Review

Language, Orality and National Cohesion

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There are incidences of conflicts, mistrusts and dichotomies in multilingual countries but many of them find a common ground to coexist as a people. Language is an ethnic identifier and a unifying factor. It is primarily a means of communication by which humanity was made and constantly refashioned. Recent development in the academia tends to emphasize the supremacy of orality in regulating and organizing societies of varying complexity as a preferred mode of socialization and pedagogy. With technology providing many coded materials in verbal and non-written genres, approximately 80% of the world population are oral learners by necessity or by preference. This paper identifies the impact of orality (spoken, sung or chanted stories, proverbs, poems, songs, riddles etc) as a means of portraying social behaviours and national phenomenon, and as well navigates territories, and delineates the geographical, spiritual, social and historical contour of environments. Orality, also, shows how a rule-governed process generates linked variants. It discusses cultural, linguistics and political problems, and explores the ambiguities of gender, ideology and identity within society's complex communities. This paper, therefore, makes case for orality as a means of national cohesion by creating and sustaining inter-ethnic harmony and development. It advocates an "orality movement" that should be academically sound, culturally sensitive and anthropologically based to take seriously, the cultural communication pattern and preference of all ethnicities of a nation such as Nigeria.

Keywords: Orality, cultural communication pattern, linguistics, Nigeria, Language

INTRODUCTION

No culture permits any individual to be on his own without contact or links with other individuals whether of the same or varying ethnicities. It means, "No man is an island". Every society has adopted some conventions for expressing feelings, emotions, ideas, thoughts, their existence and ways of life. Without these conventions, there can be no co-existence and civilization, cohesion and development will be impossible (Wiles, 2017). Multicultural cohesion, also known as, the "melting point" is the foundation of America since the end of the 18th century, but without national cohesion, "Epluribus Unum" (Out of many, one) the motto of the USA becomes "ExUnoPlures" (Out of one, many) with cultural enclaves all over the country becoming more important than the sovereignty and unity of the country as a whole.

That is not to say people should not celebrate their heritage and culture. America is a country in which many diverse cultures exist, co-exist and find common grounds as Americans. This is nationalism (national cohesion). In Nigeria, the much needed national integration is a function of language. In a document, Federal Republic of Nigeria on Education (1977:8), it is stated that "In addition to appreciating the importance of language in the educational process and as a means of preserving the people's culture, the government considers it to be in the interest of national unity that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his own mother-tongue". The society depends on it for everything. Language is more powerful when expressed orally. Most cultures in the world are primarily

oral. Literacy is at best a support to the oral world view and social patterns of most cultures of the world. A strong case need to be made to accept orality in Nigeria as a creative means of exceptional diversity, longevity and adaptability by which the differing ethnicities can effectively organize, manage and regulate themselves. Today, we are communicating so much as never before. Smart phones and social networks have really defined a new kind of speaking. We are by this development experiencing the dominance of orality. Most societies of the world operate as oral, relational societies, not just the societies once considered "primitive". The world is only becoming a new oral society by technology. This paper is therefore, peculiar in that it does not deal with orality as a fundament of the tradition or culture of our nation, but rather views orality as an instrument of national cohesion through language. This paper provides groundwork for more research among linguists from the various ethnicities in Nigeria. We shall make a case for language and orality, and consider how they aid national cohesion. We shall also make necessary suggestions on how this topic can be transformed from rhetoric into reality.

The Concept of national cohesion and its effects

Cohesion basically means glue. It is what holds a group of people together as a nationality. According to Chukwu and Eteng (2019), cohesion is said to be a process of getting all segments of the country to agree on what should be done to boost the economy and enhance security. In Atiku Abubakar's statement on Restructuring Nigeria for National Cohesion and Good Governance, he stated that national cohesion refers to a sense of unity and oneness by citizens of a country to the extent that despite their diversity, they see themselves as forming a nation. That sense of solidarity encourages them to invest economically, socially, politically and emotionally in the well-being of the nation or country. National cohesion does not mean the absence of disagreements but those disagreements play out and are resolved within the parameters laid out by the country's law and regulations, and in a manner that preserves that sense of oneness. A sense of national identity is a key element of that culture. Without it, there is no cohesion. According to Drac Smith (2018), culture is almost always the source of national cohesion. Without a unified culture, it is nearly impossible for a nation to have cohesion. With cohesion achieved, social inclusions and others would follow as national values.

Language and the concept of orality

Language scholars have variously held opinions and defined language according to the functions of language. Liles (1975) opines that without language, civilization will not be possible. Sociologists perceive language as a means of socialization and interaction. Linguists say that language is a systematic body of arbitrary symbols employed in the process of communication (Dairo, 2015). It is a creation of God in every man born into any society. And every society has adopted some conventions for exercising the faculty of speech and expressing their existence and ways of life. In this sense, language is seen as performing a socializing function, engendering co-operation and fostering education. Language primarily exists to perform communication functions in a society. Ancillary, it seems like an ethnic identifier and a unifying factor. In the same circumstance, language is employed as an instrument used to enhance national integration of diverse ethnicities into the fabrics of a nation. The very act of speaking, which sets humans apart from other living species, involves the translating of thoughts in audible words or speech. The survival of such thought is made possible through oral transmission, recording or writing which are all interfaces that depend on an act of translation across language or various communication media. Orality is an important feature of human speech and communication. Anthropologists and historians conceptualize orality as the medium of expression and discourse of non-literate culture. Colonialists and missionaries explored orality as means to understanding societies for purposes of proselytism and civilization. Orality, according to John Miles Foley, is the first and still most widespread mode of human communication. Far more than "just talking", orality refers to a dynamic and highly diverse oral-aural medium for evolving, storing and transmitting knowledge, art and ideas. Joyce Middleton stresses that orality is permanent. It is not replaced by literacy. We have always and will continue to always use human speech arts in our various forms of communication, even as we now witness changes in our personal and professional uses of alphabetic forces of literacy in a number of ways. Orality thrives on the wheels of academic soundness, sensitivity to cultures and anthropological lineage (Orville Boyd Jenkins, 2017). According to Bortha Pieter (2018), orality is not dependent on modern media processes and techniques. It is positively created by specific forms of education and cultural activities. Orality refers to the experience of words (and speech) in the habitat of sound. Before writing was developed, cultures passed along their cultural traditions, including their history, identity and religion through their stories, proverbs, poems, songs, riddles, etc. which are spoken, sung or chanted. When it is untouched by any knowledge or writing or print, it is termed primary orality. Today, however, Walter J. Onag infers that primary orality hardly exist, since every culture knows of writing and has some experience of its effects. In all of these, digitalization, that is to say, disembodiment of information is giving room to direct contact with our communication partners. Hence, orality is sustained by telephone, radio, television and other electronic devices.

It has become the predominant mode of communication in the world (James A. Marey). This, however, has not and cannot stop writing. Richard Nordquist, (2019) highlights some of the distinctive ways in which people in a "primary oral culture" think and express themselves through narrative discourse as follows:

(i) Co-ordinate and polysyndetic expression, rather than subordinate and hypotactic.
(ii) Aggregative expressions (epithets and antithetical phrases).
(iii) Redundant and copious expressions.
(iv) Expressions and relatively with close reference to the human world (preference for the concrete rather than the abstract).
(v) Expression is agonistic in tone (that is, competitive rather than co-operative).
(vi) Proverbs (maxims) are convenient vehicles for conveying simple beliefs and cultural attitudes.

In all of these, Joyce Irene Middleton affirms that orality is not the opposite of literacy. It utilizes understanding in the cultural communication pattern and preference of ethnicities of the world.

Making case for orality

Human interaction in the world depends on, and is enhanced through verbal or written forms which today exist at parallel but are never dichotomous. Oral cultures seem to be more pervasive than written culture in many parts of the world – as observed by Francis Ganyi in his script titled "Orality, Literacy and Pedagogical Implications in Traditional African Societies: The Bakor Experience in Cross Rivers State, Nigeria". According to him, technology has produced a wide range of literacy materials all encoded in verbal or non-written genres. Many in the western world are now discovering that there is so much we can learn from the more relational communal oral cultures. Jerry Wiles observed that these oral-based concepts, principles and practices are what allowed the gospel to spread throughout the entire populated world in the first century. Oral discourse are therefore predominant in most independent communities all over the world, and knowledge system have as such been constructed and communicated through these oral discourses or verbal systems with emphasis on graphic contextual performances. Francis Ganyi noted that recent developments in the academia have tended to emphasize the supremacy of orality as a preferred mode of socialization and pedagogical functions. Orality can improve relationships within local congregation, as well as among leaders on a regional basis. Over the past forty years, Jerry Wiles, (2017) noted that there has been increasing awareness among global mission leaders of the importance of orality as it relates to completing the "Great Commission". There are many oral preference learners throughout the entire world. Approximately 80% of the world population is oral learners by necessity or by preference (https://orality.net/about/who-are-oral-learners). As the Orality movement is growing and maturing, there is a greater recognition and discovery of how the multiple applications of the concepts, principles and practices of orality can enhance evangelism, disciple making and church planting. Similarly, there are many other applications including areas such as integral mission, community health, relief and development, and leadership training. In Jerry Wiles word, "Orality enables a people to cross every barrier and border on the planet. It reaches all manner of people anywhere." Nigeria is a mixture of oral cultures and literate culture. In the African context, orality is seen as the means by which societies of varying complexity regulated themselves, organize their present and their past, made formal spaces for philosophical reflections, pronounced on power, questioned and in some cases contested power, and generally paid homage to the word "language" as the means by which humanity was made and constantly refashioned. As cited in Grant Lovejoy (2018), a Zimbabweans PhD student said, "Literacy is like a shawl that we Africans wraparound us, but orality is who we are. You Americans talk about literacy as a method of communication and that is true. But don't ever think of orality as merely a method, it is our identity". Many people who carry books do not read them. Some may be unable to read and write. They learn in other ways. They rely on spoken form of communication. This lifestyle of depending on non-print form of communication is what researchers have seen as a way of living, not illiteracy. That people learn by what they see and experience through oral and aural form, and through conversations cannot be termed illiterate as the focus is only on one thing that somebody or group cannot do (Grant Lovejoy, 2018). Learning is not necessarily by taking notes, it is by doing. People can be highly educated but still prefer oral forms of communication and learning. Oral people are as intelligent, resourceful and resilient as people in other cultures – may be, even more resilient. Grant Lovejoy infers that if we hope to shape oral culture identity, we need to allow this reality to inform the way we go about it. Orality was the means by which Africa made its existence, its history long before the colonial and imperia presence of the West manifested itself. In this circumstance, orality needs to be seen not simply as the "absence of literacy" but as something self-constitutive. It is neither positive nor accurate to take one model that valorizes the written word as the blueprint for how the human race has developed. Even in societies where literacy has been introduced or thrive, many people are able to communicate much more effectively through speech and hearing. It is the most prevalent and preferred way of communication for millions of people. Most novels and play are better understood when

presented orally on television, film, music etc. Laurent Lepaludier, 2006, it is important that to note the following peculiarities about orality:

(i) The sounded word is power and action.
(ii) Orality is based on mnemonics and formulas.
(iii) Orality is additive rather than subordinate.
(iv) Orality is aggregative rather than analytical.
(v) Orality is redundant.
(vi) Orality is agonistically toned.
(vii) Orality is empathetic and participating rather than objectively distanced.
(viii) Orality is homeostatic (focusing on relevance).
(ix) Orality is situational rather than abstract.

How orality aids national cohesion: incidences and instances

Oral communication is quite unique in its spontaneity and communicative power. Individual creativity and ways of speaking can provide the spark that can ignite revolution or calm the soul. Orality guarantees direct interaction with the possibility to experiment with new expressions and forms of thinking, and to bring in the social emotional dimensions of problem and solutions. (C.M.J Van Woerkum, 2002). In an extensive study, "Oral Tradition Communication", John Miles Foley highlighted incidences and instances of the power of the spoken words. According to him, in Australia, some of the Aboriginal people navigate their territory through series of short songs popularly known as Song lines. These constitute a catalogue of local route delineating the geographical, spiritual, social and historical contour of their environment. South African praise singers often create orally performed resumes for tribal chiefs that portray objectionable social behaviours or that explain the origin of national phenomena. History, religion and ritual merge in major oral events (Example – those involving mixture of storytelling, song and movement). In the Democratic Republic of Congo, oral performances show how a rule-governed process generates linked variants. Thriving oral genres include protest songs, spirit narratives, love songs, clan traditions, lament and dance dramas in the pacific islands. The Basque poets of Southern France and Northern Spain use their improvising contest poetry called Bertsolaritza, not merely to entertain but to discuss cultural, linguistic and political problems. Women in the host of Southern Asian cultures employ oral tradition to explore the ambiguities of gender, ideology and identity within their complex communities. In Kangra, a town in Northwestern India, older women sing a type of song known as Pakharu to contemplate and comment on the hardships of married life. In the United States of America, folk preachers use oral tradition to extrapolate stories based on biblical accounts; hip-hop and rap artistes improvise socially coded poetry along familiar rhythmic and rhyming patterns, and in so-called slam poetry competitions. Following these instances and incidences, a string case need to be made to accept orality in Nigeria as a creative means of exceptional diversity, longevity and adaptability by which the differing ethnicities can effectively organize, manage and regulate themselves. This will satisfy professional's concepts and programmes on orality.

Conclusion

National cohesion boosts economy and enhances security. Without orality, there can be no cohesion. The oral form of language is a very crucial aspect of communication required to facilitate integration and national cohesion. It is a strong marker of identity and socio-cultural value which must be accounted for in inter lingual transfer and national cohesion. Researchers have seen orality as a way of living (learning by what they see and experience through oral and aural art form). Summarily, there is a tendency to favour the spoken rather than the written form of language in effectively organizing, managing and regulating a society. We live in a time of fundamental media upheaval. This simplifies sharing and storing oral communication which is the most effective way that people have learned, communicated and processed information from the beginning of time. The study of orality is closely allied to the study of tradition. It has enabled a people to cross every barrier and borders on the planet. It reaches all manner of people anywhere. Thus, it is important to note that if we, Nigerians were to cross every barriers and boarders in the nation today; we need to start telling our stories using the national pledge.

Recommendations

(i) In order to make this paper on "Language Orality and National Cohesion" a reality from rhetoric, the following recommendation are relevant:
(ii) There is the need to develop extensive training and orientation programmes to learn the thought forms and practical skills of oral cultures across the country.
(iii) There is the need to train linguists and analyze unwritten languages and design in community programmes for citizens' language learning and cultural orientation (oral literacy and storytelling skills).
(iv) There is need to train out professionals in anthropology and cross-cultural communication. This ensures that we learn at least the language in the place where we work.
(v) There is need to form Nigeria Orality Network to sensitize the citizenry on national cohesion with special emphasis on accommodating one another as a people

with common goal.

(vi) The orality movement should be academically sound, culturally sensitive and anthropologically based, to take seriously the cultural communication pattern and preferences of all ethnicities of the society.

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